

Reading The Game: strategy consultation

Executive summary

Purpose

The RTG consultation of partners, beneficiaries and other stakeholders was carried out to:

- conduct a needs analysis
- identify priority areas for development
- discover any barriers regarding sports-related literacy issues

The aim was to develop a strategy of how Reading The Game (RTG) could help target areas of need, fulfil priorities and overcome barriers.

The information collected is being used to inform the future shape, development and delivery of RTG projects and resources.

Method of implementation

1. Consultation plan created
2. Participants identified
3. Questionnaires designed (see Appendix A for example questionnaire, full questions available on request)
4. Consultation interviews (email, telephone, face-to-face) arranged and conducted
5. SWOT analysis conducted with NLT colleagues and FF
6. Relevant research papers relating to sport and literacy identified and summarised (Appendix B)
7. Report written to inform RTG strategy, development and delivery

Participants

We worked with the three main groups of RTG stakeholders: beneficiaries, deliverers and partners. A full list of names and organisations is available on request, and included in the full consultation report.

Beneficiaries:

Two groups of students from years 4 and 6 of an inner-city school in Manchester took part.

Deliverers:

This group is defined as those who currently, or could potentially, deliver programmes to beneficiaries, such as Playing for Success centres and libraries.

Partners:

This group is defined as: (i) those who would determine how and if their organisations could deliver or aid delivery of RTG programmes for mutual benefit; (ii) RTG funders.

Results

The consultation focused on ten key questions covering the opinions and needs of our stakeholders in terms of RTG and wider literacy issues.

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These questions are detailed in the full consultation report. For the purposes of this executive summary, our findings can be summarised under three key headings:

1. Current RTG activity
2. Priorities for future development
3. Impact

1. Current RTG activity

The feedback about RTG projects and resources was overwhelmingly positive, and both were consistently described as good and excellent. RTG is highly regarded, and fosters excellent relationships between clubs and their communities. The benefits extend to both staff and pupils, making a significant difference toward their approach and attitudes. RTG provides training for staff and raises their confidence and self-esteem, while for pupils RTG raises achievement and enjoyment of reading. The range of programmes is appreciated, although conversely there is some confusion as to which programme delivers which outcomes, and whether there is actually a need for this number of programmes.

2. Priorities for future development

The following were identified as target groups who would benefit from RTG:

- Boys
- Looked After Children
- Disabled children
- Young carers
- BME
- Families
- Parents – particularly fathers
- Transition between primary and secondary

The following were identified as priority areas to address:

- Use of role-models
- Boys' writing
- Speaking and Listening skills
- Promotion of a love of books and reading
- Raising confidence in reading materials
- Reducing gaps in attainment
- Greater participation
- New technology
- Enjoyment
- Working with partners across a wide range of disciplines and sectors
- Meaningful accreditation of volunteers/deliverers, training and workforce development of players/coaches/academy players
- Supporting schools in raising literacy standards, including the extension of PfS into schools
- Library membership and promotion of libraries into all parts of local community, new readers

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Resources.

A wide range of resources was suggested, but in particular there were numerous requests for more posters and DVDs following the success of previous RTG resources.

Projects:

The following are some of the suggestions made relating to potential RTG project activities:

- Projects delivering storytelling and promoting communications skills
- Menu of programmes specific to local authority need, related to specific area
- Linked Reading, Writing, Speaking & Listening programmes
- Work with other sports, including Olympics, Rugby
- Projects should link in with other funded projects (e.g. Prince's Trust, V, Kickz, PfS)
- Parental involvement

Potential issues:

Issues which might stand in the way of delivery included lack of time, curriculum restrictions, self-perception of children as poor readers, transience of teachers and pupils, poor support from club, lack of funding, and lack of support from senior management in schools.

Other sport related literacy activities:

We asked participants what other sport related literacy activities they were aware of or part of, so that RTG can complement existing programmes. These included: Up for the Cup (FA), PfS, Chance to Shine, Heading for Success and Museums Libraries and Archives' five year project plan for work with the Olympics.

3. Impact

Support for extra-curriculum activity:

There was overwhelming support for the impact of extra curriculum activity to underpin conventional learning. Participants felt that pupils benefit from broader contexts for, and methods of, learning, and not being in school can capture students' attention and imagination. Learning outside the classroom raises self-esteem and motivation, adds a new dimension to learning, and raises the awareness of parents and the wider community. In this context learning is not perceived as hard work, and appears more relevant to children's lives, giving them ownership of the project and a voice concerning their own education. There is clear evidence from both PfS and RTG that sports-related education and environments engage children and improve attainment.

Evidence and evaluation:

Several suggestions were made as to how we could measure the impact of RTG projects, including attitudinal questionnaires, compiling case-studies, and quantitative data regarding numbers of pupils involved, stock takeout and library membership.

The value of sport:

Participants felt that sport could be a huge influence in helping pupils and learners to participate in learning, and that RTG programmes and resources could serve as a catalyst for raising standards. Young people are seen to be interested and enthralled by football, and players are powerful and respected role models who can help to overcome fears and tackle prejudice. Through sport attainment and self-esteem can improve as reading becomes a hobby: an enjoyable and social activity as pupils don't realise they are learning. Sport provides an

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opportunity for a diverse range of children to share knowledge and skills; it crosses boundaries of culture, age, gender and language. It provides a way to inspire and encourage, especially disaffected boys. It links learning to interests, links reading and exercise.

Young people:

A significant percentage of our target audience is schoolchildren. Feedback from two year groups (8 year-olds and 11 year-olds) showed that boys were generally much more interested in football than girls, and that girls were generally much more interested in reading than boys. *As a group* the children claimed not to be influenced by footballers' reading, but the individual pupils who were football fans admitted they would be more likely to be influenced by them. The children were very interested in attending literary events at football stadiums (regardless of their interest in football or reading), and were very interested in celebrities and the role that they could play in promoting reading, particularly those celebrities whose ethnic backgrounds mirrored the ethnicity of the children. The younger group were influenced in reading by their parents, while the older children cited peers as more influential. Children were put off libraries because they perceived them as quiet and static, and believed they would be more likely to enjoy reading if it was presented in a more lively way: for example, in a football stadium or linked to physical activity. The children seemed to have a strong desire to choose and own their own books, and were also motivated by prizes and competition.

Player involvement

We wish to work closely with players. Consultation participants felt that players should have a real interest in reading, so as to convey a genuine message.

We asked Alan Smith from Manchester United FC about how we might be able to work more closely with players. He explained that he enjoys personal satisfaction from his charity and community work as it is different to the rest of his job, and that it is the benefit to recipients and not the press involvement that motivates him. He felt that he and other players would consider supporting a particular cause if they had a particular interest in it, but explained that it is difficult for players to have personal contact with charities, particularly those from big clubs, due to the nature of the way they are protected from outside contact. He also told us that players are often not briefed properly when it comes to charity events. He believes that players would be happy to do most things, but that they need more information about the cause or project. He also made the point that players do read!

Conclusions

- Football and sport are ideal partners for delivering literacy activities for hard-to-reach groups.
- RTG as an initiative that raises motivation around learning, and should continue to work outside of the curriculum.
- Existing programmes are well received and well targeted, but should be streamlined and simplified.
- Programmes should be developed and expanded to meet identified needs, such as writing programmes which are not yet in place
- RTG needs to work with targeted groups, especially boys and men, in targeted settings.

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- RTG needs to provide a range of embedded resources and projects directly reaching identified areas of greatest need.
- RTG should continue to build on its partnership work, and help deliverers to support their communities.
- Meaningful evaluation needs to be built into all areas of work.

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Appendix A – example of questionnaire

1. Why is it important to work with literacy promotion programmes outside of school / the curriculum? Do you have any evidence to support this?
2. In your role, what are some of the priority areas that could link in with sport over the next five years?
3. What do you think of our current resources?
4. How do you / the teachers you work with use our current resources (if applicable)?
5. What could our current projects do for you?
6. What other sport related resources would be helpful to you and the schools you work with?
7. Is there anything else, sport-related, that we could provide for you?
8. How could we increase teachers' awareness of our work? Is there anything else that we could do for you to help disseminate this info?
9. How could we use sport to motivate reluctant readers?
10. Specifically boys?
11. What are the barriers to teachers to delivering sport-related literacy promotion projects / using resources?
12. Do you know of any other sport-related literacy promotion projects?
13. What are the potential impacts of sport-related literacy promotion projects / resources? How could we measure them?
14. Would you welcome separate projects promoting (i) speaking and listening (ii) reading (iii) writing?
15. Could you access money to deliver sport-related literacy-promotion activities?

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Appendix B – Does it work? The impact of sport on educational outcomes in general and literacy in particular

This research brief outlines some research into the link between sport and educational achievement, with particular emphasis on literacy outcomes. It aims to show that: (1) sport benefits educational attainment; (2) the subject of football is appealing to boys and becomes a motivator to re-engage with literacy and wider learning; and (3) programmes that have used football as a hook into learning have been successful in raising personal and academic achievement. However, it should be noted at the outset that while the evidence base of the impact of sport on general educational outcomes is growing, studies of the effect on literacy remain sketchy.

A US survey in 2006 showed that the majority of respondents believed there is a link between sport and academic achievement (Goidel & Hamilton, 2006). Indeed, academic research corroborates this public perception. For example, studies have shown that sport and PE at school can help not only improve physical health and coordination but can also impact on wider educational issues, such as concentration, self-confidence and communication skills, especially among children and young people who are at risk of low achievement (Sport England, 2005). Sport can also provide learning opportunities and activities for young people who have left mainstream educational provision. For example, an association with sport can attract young people to learning activities, with sport being used as the subject through which to teach basic skills, such as reading, numeracy or ICT (Sport England, 2005). For an outline of the wider impact of sport see Sport England's report: *Sport Playing Its Part*, which discusses the importance of sport with respect to the five areas outlined in *Every Child Matters*.

Studies show that sport does not only have an impact as a subject matter but that being active in itself can improve educational outcome. For example, evaluations of schools where pupils have participated in regular exercise and have adopted a healthy diet have shown that pupils perform better in reading, writing, maths and science than at schools where such an emphasis on sport is lacking (Sinnott, 2005).

Football as a motivator to re-engage with learning may be a particularly powerful tool for boys. Time and again, research has shown that boys fall behind girls in terms of literary achievement (for a recent study that showed this to be the case in 43 countries see Chiu and McBride-Chang, 2006). The literature shows that boys frequently find it harder to read than girls, and as a result read less (Coles & Hall, 2002). Boys also frequently say that they do not enjoy reading (OECD, 2002) and tend to have less positive attitudes towards reading than girls (Sainsbury & Schagen, 2004). Yet, part of the lack of enjoyment might be masked by a difficulty in finding reading materials that boys are interested in and this is where football and other sports can become the motivational hook. Studies have consistently shown that boys tend to be interested in reading about hobbies, sport and activities they might engage in. Indeed, when asked in a National Literacy Trust survey (2005) which famous people would influence them if they said that they needed to be able to read well, boys tended to provide the names of footballers, followed by other sports people.

In addition to *Reading The Game*, other initiatives have used the intuitive appeal of football to motivate young people in a way that formal learning for children and adults cannot. For example,

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Playing for Success, an initiative that aims to raise educational standards by creating study support centres in football clubs and other sport venues, uses sport as a medium to support literacy, numeracy and ICT. Four years of national evaluation studies have shown that pupils' literacy, numeracy and ICT skills have improved significantly, bringing underachieving pupils closer to national norms (for a recent evaluation of the long-term changes in pupils' educational performance associated with attending *Playing for Success* Centres please see Sharpe et al., 2007). The programme also significantly impacted on pupils' independent study skills, self-image and self-confidence¹. It should be noted that while football and other sports can be a motivator to help raise achievement and re-engagement with reading, there is no evidence that the sports emphasis marginalises girls or ethnic minorities (Sharp et al., 2003).

Evaluation studies, especially long-term ones, that indicate which components of a football-linked programme are particularly important to a project's success, however, are lacking. Nevertheless, there is evidence from systematically evaluated programmes, such as *Playing for Success*, to suggest that the football environment is important in motivating pupils to participate in out-of-school educational initiatives. An analysis of effective *Playing for Success* Centres (see Sharpe et al., 2007) showed that a good partnership between Centres and schools was critical to establish a programme of high quality learning during the course and to facilitate transfer of learning after the pupils had left the programme. Equally important were good relationships with the host club as well as the local authority, Critical Friends and the central team at the DfES. Interestingly, however, an evaluation of *Playing for Success* also indicated that although football was an important attraction for pupils, the chance to use computers and the internet at centres were more important factors for pupils when they were asked to state what they were looking forward to most at the centres (Sharp et al., 2003).

Finally, a recent evaluation of Positive Futures (Crabbe, 2006) – a national sports and activity-based social inclusion programme that aims to support and re-engage young people living in socially and economically deprived communities to promote education and employment, suggested that:

- While the environment and medium of sport is a powerful motivator to learning, it is not sport per se that is the key to a project's success, but the ability to find activities that attract and engage young people. Indeed, what is needed is to adopt a model of delivery that is flexible enough to cope with a diverse range of interests and personalities rather than one that relies upon more formulaic sports development approaches.

¹ The use of football to further education has been criticised. For example, Skelton (2000, p.13) suggested that the use of football can be counter-productive in that it might encourage a laddish culture and might marginalise entire groups on the basis of cultural background, gender and sexuality.

- With regards to staff, although relationships may be successfully built by a member of staff who is sports competent, a successful relationship is primarily driven by participants' identification with the socio-cultural background and approach of the member of staff.

Based on the research briefly outlined above, I conclude that sport, and in particular foot ball, is a powerful tool for engaging young disaffected pupils in learning and for raising academic and personal achievement. For Reading The Game I specifically recommend the following:

- To maximise the effectiveness of RTG, continue developing partnerships between sport clubs, libraries and schools, and local authorities
- Advocate and provide materials and ideas that are diverse enough to capture the varying interests of underachieving young people
- Begin to capture the long-term impact of pupils participating in RTG programmes to help address the knowledge gap.

Dr Christina Clark – Senior policy and research analyst, May 2007.

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